



Volume 29 No. 5 May/June 2001

FIRE FIGHTER



**Remembering
workers who died**

GENERAL SECRETARY

Investment must be

IT IS good to see that public service provision was at the top of the General Election agenda. Labour is clearly committed to substantial rises in spending on health, Education and the Police (but a bit less clear on other frontline services). The Tories wanted to limit increases to make room for tax cuts for their richer supporters.

While the renewed interest in public services is welcome, some of Labour's pronouncements are worrying. We know that the Tories are the party of privatisation often putting private profit before people's needs. But it comes as a shock to hear leading Labour politicians extolling the merits of private provision. Have they not heard of the mess that privatised Railtrack has made of our railways or of the recent failures of privatised British Telecom? Do they not worry about the time it takes to negotiate contracts with private contractors before investment projects can go ahead? Are they not concerned about the lack of transparency and accountability in joint ventures? And have they no qualms when negotiated terms and conditions for public sector workers are undermined and undercut by private providers looking for profits at the expense of their workforces and the public?

Apparently the response to these objections is to look to the management skills and investment funds that the private sector brings with it. Well, we've travelled on Virgin trains, we've watched Marks & Spencers going to the dogs and we are not impressed by the performance of private sector managers. And we know that the private sector will only invest when it can make safe profits for which the public will pay in increased taxes and charges. Surely the whole point about public services is to put people's needs first and to finance social requirements through progressive taxation. The private sector is about profits for shareholders, the public sector meets social needs for essential services, as far as possible free at the point of use.



ANDREW WARD/REPORTPHOTOS.COM

Britain is a rich country and can well afford better public services without crippling rises in taxation. Nearly twenty years of Tory Government through the 1980s and most of the 1990s has left us near the bottom of the European Union league for public spending both on current account and on long-term investment. Labour has begun to change this, but after four years of Tony Blair's government Britain remains a low spend country.

So the first priority is to put the investment in year on year. This will take time but it cannot be avoided if we are to build decent services for all the people. Nowhere is this truer than in the Fire Service which is crying out for new investment to better protect the public and the workforce.

Of course there must also be constant dialogue involving politicians, the work force and the public about how to improve service provision. But this cannot be done on the cheap, nor can it be led by the profit making needs of the private sector. In fact there is no unequivocal evidence that private sector management improves efficiency of that it is somehow inherently superior to the

INTERNATIONAL WORKERS DAY

ANDY Gilchrist, General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union planted a tree (cover picture) outside the Union's Head Office in Coombe Road, Kingston Upon Thames, on Saturday 28 April at 11.00hrs in

commemoration of International Workers Day.

On 28 April each year, Trade Unions and health and safety campaigners in over 100 countries focus on the issue of workers' health and safety. Workers Memorial Day is a day when we "mourn for the dead, fight for the living", drawing attention to the plight of



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the first priority

public sector. Private contractors have sometimes cut the costs of hospital cleaning by reducing staff numbers and wages but this has led to poor performance and grubby disease-ridden wards. Labour should abandon attempts at privatisation by stealth – so far they have been spectacularly unsuccessful and should be dropped before they totally discredit the Labour Government.

THE RIGHT TO STRIKE

With their party trailing very behind in the opinion polls, Tory leaders were again campaigning to deny public sector workers their human rights. In the light of recent disputes on the London Underground, Mr Haig resurrected proposals to outlaw strikes in essential services. So for the Tories it is OK to ignore international laws and Conventions to which Britain is a signatory as they scramble for votes. The Right to Strike is one of the marks of a civilised and free society whereby, as a last resort workers can withdraw their labour in order to persuade unreasonable employers to think again. This right is recognised by the United Nations and incorporated in International Labour Office Conventions which Britain signed up to over 50 years ago.

Labour's record on employment rights is far from perfect. The anti-union measures introduced by the Thatcher-Major Governments remain on the Statute book. We see this as unfinished business and we will press the Labour Government to bring British employment law into line with the best international standards. In particular this means extending all rights so that they cover workers from the first day of their employment – at present, for example, workers have to have a year's service before qualifying for legal protection against unfair dismissal. It also means expanding the right to strike so that trade unionists can support workers in disputes at home and abroad. The right to take sympathy and solidarity action needs to be restored in line with

ILO Conventions and British workers should have the same rights as our European Union sisters and brothers to information and consultation particularly in redundancy situations.

It is this 'right to strike' that by the time of distribution of this issue, our brothers and sisters in Merseyside will be seeking to exercise. Following close on two years of attempting to work with a Chief Fire Officer and Fire Authority that have no respect only contempt for their workforce, enough is enough. Consistently ignoring outcomes from national industrial relations machinery and constantly being duplicitous in their dealings locally a ballot of our membership will be under way. The result will be a huge 'Yes' vote to take discontinuous strike action, the Chief and Authority alike have to now learn the hard way, the FBU, its members and Officials alike will not be treated as second class citizens in a service they provide! So the Authority have chosen that partnership and dialogue can be used as a one way street for their aims, well they will find out that easy or hard the FBU is good at both ways of conducting industrial relations. Send now your support in writing to our comrades in Merseyside, the Fire Service will be better off without the likes of those currently in charge of the Merseyside Fire service!

All this is part of the post-election agenda. But politics doesn't stop on June 7th. The next job will be to redouble our efforts and campaign to convince the Blair Government of the need to go boldly forward with measures which challenge the powerful and privileged and advance the interests of working people and their families both in Britain and internationally. Only then will we see a new Britain where workers' rights are guaranteed, where full employment in decent jobs becomes the norm, and where poverty is eradicated. This will not be an easy task but with our allies in the wider trade union movement, we can make a difference and help create better public services in a better Britain.

ANDY GILCHRIST

335,000 workers worldwide who die every year as a result of their work, but also campaign to prevent further deaths, injuries and disease.

Andy Gilchrist said: "The last decade of the last millennium saw 27 firefighters lose their lives at incidents. By any reckoning this is

too high a price to have paid by any industry. Working in the Fire Service is not a hazardous occupation; it only becomes so when our safety is ignored. The Fire Brigades Union has planted this tree to mark this day and to remember all those workers who have lost their lives at work".



FBU CONFIDENTIAL FREEPHONE HELPLINE

0 8 0 0 7 8 3 4 7 7 8

FAIRNESS AT WORK is about treating others as we would wish to be treated ourselves – with respect

RACISM IN THE WORKPLACE

Racism gets worse in Britain's workplaces

RACISM in Britain's workplaces is intensifying as Black and Asian people are now more than twice as likely to be unemployed as their white counterparts, says a new TUC report, *Black workers deserve better*, released last month. And to reverse this unacceptable trend the TUC wants all employers to be legally required to promote good race relations in their organisations.

Black and Asian joblessness today stands at 12 per cent, while among white people it is just five per cent. This position is worse than in 1990 when Black and Asian unemployment was lower at 11 per cent and higher among the white population at six per cent. This trend has grown worse despite unemployment dropping below one million. Black and Asian workers have clearly not gained equally from Britain's expanding economy compared to their white counterparts.

The TUC report calls on the Government to take further action to reverse this trend. It wants the newly amended Race Relations Act to be extended to give private and voluntary sector employers the same legal obligations as those imposed on all public authorities. All employers should be legally required to take positive action to promote good race relations and take action to prevent any form of racial discrimination.

The report was launched on the opening day of the TUC's Black Workers' conference at 2pm in the Dewars Centre, Perth. Britain's

SUMMARY of recommendations in *Black workers deserve better*:

- Extension of the enforceable general duties of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 to cover the private and voluntary sectors.
- Adoption of the definition of indirect discrimination from the European Union Race Directive for use in domestic legislation.
- Organisational reviews to identify whether institutional racism exists within workplaces.
- Employers and Trade Unions working in partnership to develop clear action plans to tackle institutional racism from the workplace.
- Employers and Trade Unions working in partnership to set targets, with clear time limits, to achieve fair representation of black workers at all levels in the workplace.



Ford workers at Dagenham walk out over alleged racist incidents

leading black Trade Unionist and TUC President, Bill Morris, of the Transport Workers Union, addressed the conference.

John Monks, TUC General Secretary, said: "Too many employers are ignoring the lessons of the MacPherson Inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence. They have to face up to the reality of racism in their organisations and act against it. Despite unemployment dropping below one million our Black and Asian workers are still suffering appalling discrimination.

"And this is made worse as Black and Asian workers are passed over for managerial jobs, even though they have skilled themselves by gaining more higher educational qualifications. All employers should monitor their recruitment and promotion procedures and reverse this unacceptable position."

In some of Britain's regions the situation is even worse. In both Yorkshire and Humberside and the West Midlands, 5 per cent of white workers are unemployed compared to 15 per cent of Black and Asians. But even after getting a job Black and Asian workers still face discrimination as they find it increasingly difficult to get managerial posts. And this occurs despite black workers making serious efforts to equip themselves for promotion. The proportion of Black and Asian workers educated to degree level or above increased from 21 per cent to 26 per cent over the last 18 months. In the same period white employees with similar qualifications only increased from 16 per cent to 17 per cent.

There were 18.7 per cent white managers in Summer 1999 and 19 per cent in Winter 2000/1 – up 0.3 per cent. In the same year the proportion of Black and Asian workers in managerial jobs remained static at 14.9 per cent.

TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING

THOUGHT you might like to know that our senior management team had a brilliant idea to dispel the “them and us” culture and improve communications between management and station personnel.

The idea was that principal officers would make regular station visits. However, it was allegedly reported back to a forum of DOs that station personnel were “possibly receiving too much communication” and as a result, the principal officers’ visits have been curtailed.

Mushrooms and the dark come to mind!

THE SECRET OF PROMOTION

IT’S nice to know that the Masonic club is still alive and well in the UK Fire Service.

When a temporary ADO in a county Brigade informs a temporary Leading Firefighter that he is being reduced to the rank of Firefighter, against his will, whilst the temporary ADO (who is allegedly a member of a secret society), continues to keep his temporary rank for a further year and then gains substantive promotion.

BROWN STUDY

SHROPSHIRE Fire and Rescue Service is currently replacing its well used, but worn out, Compartment Fire Training Facility.

The new building, bearing a passing resemblance to the notorious “H Blocks”, is currently being prepared for an official launch and an article in the *Fire* magazine.

However, local by-laws dictate that the facility must be painted brown to be sympathetic to the local environment, before the structure is fired and the paint subsequently burnt off.

Let’s keep the home fires burning.

LOST FOR WORDS

AT THE recent Scottish Trades Union Congress, the Fire Brigades Union arrived at the Association of University Teachers Scotland’s hotel to invite delegates for a fraternal drink. The FBU were astonished to find the dons playing Scrabble. They proposed a bet over which delegation could first mention the word during the conference the next day. As seconder of the following day’s first motion, the AUTS were confident of victory and accepted the challenge. But the FBU raised a point of order before the debate started, said “Scrabble” and pocketed the £25.

From The Times Higher Education Supplement

CURE WORSE THAN THE DISEASE

THE recent ‘foot and mouth’ outbreak saw many Brigades doing their bit for the countryside in preventing its spread.

Notts Fire and Rescue (reported outbreaks – NIL) sprang into action and got their best man on the case.

Out he went and bought a job lot of ‘formaldehyde’, that will do very nicely. This was issued to stations with the appropriate instructions (well, forget the last bit!)

After a couple of hours liberally spraying the stuff around, Notts had a ‘disease free’ set of fire engines – and seven firefighters in hospital with respiratory problems!!

UNSUBTLE THREAT

THE Sicilian Mafia has revived one of its more sinister warning signs for those it wishes to intimidate: a severed horse’s head left where the victim will get the message.

La Stampa said the warning had been used in the 1950s and 1960s, but had gradually died out as Mafia bosses found more subtle forms of discipline. It was famously used in 1972 in *The Godfather*.

In the latest incident, a Trade Union activist in Palermo involved in a row over naval shipyard contracts found a horse’s head in his car. *La Stampa* said local Mafia clans had traditionally controlled the allocation of jobs and resented Union interference.

Richard Owen, The Times

Rumour has it there was a headless horse seen in Liverpool last week!

SOME MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS

LFEPA lay members (Councillors on London Fire Authority), have voted themselves a 300% increase in allowances.

The London Chief Fire Officer is to get a £20,000 per annum increase, taking his salary to £130,000, while his Deputy gets a mere £15,000 rise, taking his salary to £104,000.

NB. The Chief Officers recommendation to make the 16 lowest paid uniformed members in the London Fire Brigade redundant has been endorsed by the Best Value Review Panel.

This is yet another example of the London Fire Brigade’s radical equality initiatives!



Write to THE FIFTH COLUMN, c/o The Editor, The Firefighter, Fire Brigades Union, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey, KT2 7AE

THE BERKSHIRE EXPERIENCE



A lesson for all Brigades

'...if you fail to fight any reductions in the level of service whenever they are proposed, you will inevitably face more and more reductions'

DURING the Union's Annual Conference of 2000 the Berkshire delegation moved Emergency Resolution Number 11 – Crewing of Special Appliances which was carried by Conference, it stated:

This Conference condemns proposals from the Berkshire Brigade who informed Berkshire officials at a formal meeting in March 2000, that they intend to introduce a new type of contract outside of the NJC framework, in an attempt to introduce, before 2001, alternative arrangements for the crewing of special appliances.

Conference endorses the decision of the Berkshire Brigade Committee to oppose any reduction in the wholtime establishment and if necessary ballot its members for strike action.

The new type of contract referred to was the Brigade's idea to recruit specialist retained personnel to crew special appliances at one of our Reading stations. These personnel would not be trained in firefighting, but would be used solely for transporting special appliances to incidents when they were required.

The proposals for specialist retained were the latest in a long line of changes implemented and proposed within the Brigade



over a number of years. In order to put the recent dispute into context I believe it is worth relating some of the history leading to the strike ballot.

Over a number of years the Authority had continued to make ongoing cuts, the cuts, which led to the call for a ballot, can, I believe, be traced back as far as 1987. In 1987 a fire cover review was carried out within Berkshire, which led directly to the loss of two retained pumps and 24 retained firefighter jobs.

The review of 1987 did give some hope of a future increase in establishment levels, as it identified failings of the Brigade to meet agreed maximum response times in several areas of the County. Despite finding such failings, no remedial action was taken between 1987 and 1992.

In 1992 the Brigade again carried out a fire cover review, this review confirmed the findings of the earlier review with regard to areas of failing and made certain recommendations as to the method in which the Brigade should overcome these failures.

It recommended:

- The upgrading of a nucleus crewed station (two wholetime personnel) to full day crewing status.
- The upgrading of a retained crewed pump to wholetime status.
- The probability of the need for an additional fire station to be

built in one area before the next review of fire cover was due.

In the nine years since the above recommendations were made, not one of the recommendations has ever been implemented and no further review of fire cover has been undertaken.

What has happened since 1992 is that the Authority have cut a further 12 jobs in 1998 and have introduced an increasing number of switch/jump crewed appliances. Initially switch crewing only applied to special appliances, more recently switch crewing of specials with front line pumping appliances has been introduced.

Historically, Berkshire Brigade has had a severe problem with maintaining establishment levels (whether this is by accident or design is a matter of opinion), in 1998 when the Authority cut 12 jobs, the major concern of the membership was the effect this would have on crewing levels. Even before these cuts were implemented many of the Brigade's first line pumps were riding under strength more times than the recommended 25% level.

The Chief Fire Officer pledged to resolve the ridership problem, despite the further loss of jobs, although suggestions were put forward for a ballot for strike action to oppose these job losses, the membership of Berkshire decided not to take action at this time.

The Chief Officer did achieve his aim of improving the

THE BERKSHIRE EXPERIENCE

ridership levels on pumping appliances, but only at the expense of taking specials off the run on numerous occasions to use their crews to bolster crewing levels on pumps.

As a result of the Brigade's switch crewing policy the actual situation was worse, removing one special appliance crew at some stations meant that more than one special became unavailable.

To give an example of the situations which can arise due to low ridership and switch crewing, on occasions at one of our Reading stations there can be as few as six personnel available to crew up to four appliances (one pump, one hydraulic platform, one chemical incident unit and one operational support unit).

This brings us up to the current round of proposed cuts.

The specialist retained idea, which prompted the Emergency Conference Resolution, was pursued by the Brigade but was found to be unworkable. Instead of this proposal they pursued savings by other means. The Brigade set up a Special Appliance Review (under the guise of Best Value) to look at provision, location and crewing of special appliances.

Despite strong objections by the Union and a petition signed by over 4,600 Berkshire residents opposing the Authority's proposals, the Fire Authority agreed, at a meeting held on 13 December 2000, the following measures as part of their 2001/2002 budget.

- 24 station posts to be disestablished.
- 16 of these posts to be re-designated as a training reserve to cover crewing deficiencies and two Sub Officer posts to be created in community fire safety.
- Six jobs to go completely as a result.
- One Rescue Support Vehicle to be disestablished.
- The Brigades Emergency Feeding Unit to be scrapped.
- The number of special appliances switch crewed with pumps to be increased.
- High-rise appliances to be removed from all pre determined attendances.

These proposals, which increased the number of front line pumps switch crewing with special appliances, would have inevitably affected further the provision of fire cover within the County. When you switch crew pumps with specials it is obvious that if the special appliance is committed the pump is unavailable. This situation directly affects the level of service we provide to the public and therefore compromises their safety.

Conversely of course, if the pump is committed the special appliance is unavailable, this then has the potential to affect the safety of our own members as most special appliances are designed to assist and protect firefighters.

It is worth noting that as a direct result of these proposals, the two pumping appliances at the busiest station in the County would be switch crewed with specials, this station incidentally was one where failings in attendance times (including failings of the first appliance to meet the maximum response times) were found during the 1992 fire cover review.

We also had no doubt that due to the loss of further wholtime firefighter jobs the number of times wholtime pumps



would be crewed with four instead of five riders would certainly increase. This aspect had been a serious concern to members a few years earlier when 12 jobs were lost within the Brigade.

If the latest proposals had been implemented, the actual situation within Berkshire would have been that there would be less pumping appliances and less wholetime firefighters in 2001 than there were in 1986, in addition five frontline pumps would be switch crewing with specials, in 1986 all specials were primary crewed.

Although no specific cuts were proposed to retained numbers, there would also be less retained firefighters in 2001 than there were in 1986. This is despite the fact that the number of calls for assistance continues to increase and development of the County, both in the residential and business sectors, continues to grow.

Following acceptance by the Authority of the Brigade's proposals, it was decided to call a mass meeting of FBU members in Berkshire to discuss what, if any, action they were willing to take to oppose the proposed changes. The meeting was attended by over 300 members (including virtually all off duty wholetime personnel).

This meeting was also attended by our General Secretary; local and regional officials spoke to the assembled members before they were addressed by Andy Gilchrist. From the mood of the meeting it was clear that our members were of the opinion that they had suffered enough and were keen to take action to oppose the latest proposals.

Following the mass meeting, branch meetings were held to allow members to debate the proposals and decide on what course of action to take.

On behalf of Berkshire members the Union spoke in opposition to these proposals, consistently seeking from the Authority maintenance of the status quo pending a fire cover review. The Union also pressed for action to resolve the personnel shortfall below establishment level.

Despite the objections of the Union the Authority pressed ahead with its proposals. The Authority lodged an application for Section 19 approval to the Home Secretary on 24 January 2001.

In view of the intransigence of the Authority, the Berkshire Brigade Committee voted in favour of a ballot for strike action at a meeting on 12 February 2001, in opposition to the further proposed reductions in the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service.

The Authority was notified of a formal trade dispute on 1 March 2001, the terms for resolving the dispute were:

- Withdrawal of the Section 19 application submitted to the Home Secretary on 24 January 2001.
- A full suspension of the decision of the Fire Authority of 13 December 2000 upon the Special Appliance Review (including suspension of the implementation and operation of that decision) pending a full Fire Cover Review.
- An undertaking to recruit wholetime firefighter personnel back to approved establishment level.

No progress was made following this letter to the Authority and on 14 March 2001 the Authority was notified by our General Secretary of our intention to begin a ballot for strike action. In a

letter to the General Secretary on 16 March 2001 the Authority laid down an offer to:

- Set up a crewing level monitoring group involving Fire Authority members, Brigade management and FBU officials.
- Undertake a full fire cover review in the 2001/2002 financial year
- Refer the dispute to ACAS on terms of reference agreed with FBU officials.

In reply our General Secretary reminded the Authority of the Union's position on the dispute and stated that, with regard to the proposal to refer the dispute to ACAS, Fire Brigades Union members do not arbitrate on fire cover.

The ballot commenced on 21 March 2001 with the result due on 18 April 2001. During the period that the ballot was running, meetings between FBU officials and the Authority continued.

The result of these ongoing discussions was that a proposed settlement offer was placed before a meeting of the Fire Authority for endorsement on 17 April 2001, (the day before the announcement of the ballot result). The fact that the Authority had endorsed the proposed offer was only formally notified to the Union the following day.

On the afternoon of the 18th April 2001 the result of the ballot was announced, the result was:

YES	323	81.6%
NO	73	18.4%
SPOILT	0	0%

The turnout for the ballot was over 81%

Following the result of the ballot the offer from the Fire Authority was put to a meeting of the Brigade Committee. The Brigade Committee decided to take the offer back to the membership with a recommendation that it be rejected, as it did not meet fully the terms of the dispute.

Essentially, the offer conceded 3 of the 4 points of the trade dispute, withdrawal of Section 19, fire cover review and redress of establishment levels. It failed to address the demand for suspension of implementation of the special appliance review pending a full fire cover review (status quo).

Having taken the offer back to branch members the Brigade Committee reconvened and rejected the offer. The committee also set the date for the first strike, 1 May 2001 from 09.05 to 16.00 hours.

Following rejection of the offer a further meeting with Authority leaders was held. This resulted in another offer which provided the missing element of the status quo and still offered withdrawal of the Section 19. However this revised offer no longer contained the commitment of the Authority to redress establishment levels or undertake a fire cover review.

The Brigade Committee had no hesitation in rejecting the new offer as it was in fact worse than that offered previously. The committee also set three further strike dates. Arrangements were also made for a National Day of Action with a march and rally in Windsor to coincide with the first strike day.

THE BERKSHIRE EXPERIENCE



Following a further meeting with the Authority on Thursday 26 April 2001 another offer was made. This time it met all of the demands contained within the dispute. At a meeting of the Brigade Committee on 27 April 2001 the committee unanimously endorsed a recommendation to their branches to accept the latest offer.

As a consequence of this latest offer the strike days on 1 May and 4 May were suspended, the National Day of Action in Windsor was also suspended. Branch members debated the latest offer and on 3 May 2001 instructed the Brigade Committee to accept the offer in settlement of the dispute. The offer accepted addresses:

- The withdrawal of the Section 19 application relating to the implementation of the Special Appliance Review.
- The suspension of the implementation of the Special Appliance Review pending the setting up a joint working party including the FBU with any subsequent implementation phased in on an agreed basis.
- A prioritised Fire Cover Review in areas identified by the FBU plus any others by mutual consent. The outcomes of the Special Appliance Review validated against the results of the Fire Cover review in appropriate areas.
- A commitment to recruit personnel to the approved establishment level.

The offer that our members have accepted contains the wording that the agreement forms a binding Collective Agreement between the Fire Authority and the FBU.

Whilst the members in Berkshire are obviously pleased to have won this dispute without having to take strike action, the tragedy is that they were forced to come within a few days of a strike

before the Authority conceded to what were reasonable demands.

When the Emergency Resolution was carried at Conference on 12 May 2000, I do not believe any of us thought that we would actually have to go to such lengths to protect the service we provide to the public of Berkshire.

After enduring year upon year of cuts in the service Berkshire members finally realised they had to make a stand, no longer were they willing to let management's ill-informed decisions dictate the direction of the Brigade.

The 81.6 % strike ballot vote showed just how determined the members were to resist any further detrimental changes.

Support was excellent from all aspects of the Brigade, wholtime, retained, control and officers. Inevitably along the way some members took the decision to leave the Union prior to any strikes, those that stayed with the Union and supported its campaign to the end can feel justifiably proud of their achievements.

The Brigade Officials and Brigade Executive have shown strong leadership and have committed an extraordinary amount of time to the campaign, they have been assisted greatly by other officials and members at all levels, it is the resolve of the Berkshire members however that has seen the dispute through to a successful conclusion.

The campaign has invigorated members and support at branch and Brigade level meetings has improved dramatically, Berkshire members now know that they can have an impact on the direction the Service takes, not as individuals but collectively.

The support Berkshire members have received from others around the country has, without doubt, been invaluable. The offers of assistance, guidance from other Brigades who have had



to take strike action and the letters and messages of support to our branches has been a great boost for our members and has clearly shown the unity that exists within our Union.

The Berkshire "experience" contains, I believe, a lesson for all Brigades. Quite simply, if you fail to fight any reductions in the level of service whenever they are proposed, you will inevitably face more and more reductions.

By the time you decide to take action you may, as is the case in Berkshire, have already lost a great deal and the Service you provide to the public will have been worsened.

Berkshire members have shown their commitment to protecting the Service, having now secured the Authority's agreement to work with the Union to resolve the problems highlighted by the dispute, we now have to ensure that the Authority deliver on their promises.

All members in Berkshire hope that it is never again necessary to take such drastic action in support of a quality Service, the Authority however should be in no doubt that if it is necessary to do so, Berkshire members will once again stand up for their beliefs.

The simple fact is, as this Union constantly states on behalf of its members, CUTS COST LIVES, not just the lives of the public we serve, but also potentially our lives.

You can rest assured that if your Brigade is forced down the same line as Berkshire has been this year, we will support you as you have supported us.

UNITY IS STRENGTH

Thank you for your unity, it gave us our strength.

Paul Clarke
Regional Treasurer Region 13
and Berkshire Firefighter

AGREEMENT BETWEEN ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY AND THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

- 1 The Section 19 Application relating to the implementation of the Special Appliance Review will be withdrawn.**
- 2 The Authority will suspend implementation of the Special Appliance Review pending the setting up of a joint working party comprising Elected Members, Officers and the Fire Brigades Union. Any subsequent implementation will be phased in on an agreed basis.**
- 3 A prioritised Fire Cover Review against existing standards of the areas identified by the Fire Brigades Union (namely Slough, Bracknell, Thatcham, Reading Central and North Reading/Caversham, plus any others agreed by mutual consent) will be undertaken at the same time. The outcomes of the Special Appliance Review will be validated against the results of the Fire Cover Review in the appropriate areas.**
- 4 The Authority gives a commitment to recruit personnel to the approved establishment level.**
- 5 The Berkshire Executive of the Fire Brigades Union will form a partnership with the Chief Fire Officer and his Directors to drive forward the strategic direction of the Brigade and in particular the Authority's commitment to Best Value. To this end, an empowered member or members of the Executive will form part of all Best Value review teams and will contribute fully to the reviews.**
- 6 The Fire Brigades Union will participate fully in the change management process, 'Partners in Common Sense', being undertaken during 2001/02.**
- 7 The proposal forms a binding collective agreement between the Fire Authority and the Fire Brigades Union.**

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

PRESIDENT'S OPENING ADDRESS

Respect – at work and at Conference

PRESIDENT, Brother Mick Harper, opened the FBU's 78th Annual Conference by welcoming all delegates and visitors to Conference, including International guests Domingo Tovar Arrieta, Head of the Organising Department of the Colombian TUC and Mohamed Cheik Mohamed Lehbib, General Secretary of UGT Sario.

He gave a special welcome to Ken Cameron, retired General Secretary and retired President Ronnie and Anne Scott.

He also asked Conference to send best wishes to Philippa Clark (Head Office Researcher) who had had breast cancer and was now having chemotherapy treatment. He was pleased to report that Phil was doing well and asked comrades to excuse him for using not very Conference like language and sending Phil "a cuddle from Conference".

Mick then went on to refer to the past year and the number of disputes that the FBU had been involved in.

He made particular mention of "The Future of Fire Control Rooms and Communications" an issue, which we faced immediately following Conference 2000.

The President paid tribute to the Control Staff National Officials, the National Committee and every member in every Emergency Fire Control Room.

He praised the Cleveland membership, who have stood firm under intense pressure from every quarter, saying "the FBU in Cleveland are an example to us all." Mick once again reminded Conference that Control Room mergers are not a matter solely for control staff members, but a matter for every member of the Fire Brigades Union.

The President congratulated Berkshire FBU members, who recently won a ballot for strike against cuts in fire cover. He then spoke of a seemingly continuous dispute in Merseyside

He told Conference that we have in Merseyside a CFO,

supported by a Fire Authority, who is hell bent on destroying the conditions of our members in Merseyside. The Fire Brigades Union, locally and nationally, have followed the agreed procedures to the letter, both Andy Gilchrist and Mike Fordham have attended disputes with local Officials as well as meetings with the Joint Secretaries of the NJC, all of which seem to be of no avail. The latest position is that the CFO and Fire Authority have ignored two unanimous decisions of the National Disputes Committee and our members have therefore asked for a ballot for strike action.

The President then turned to the forthcoming General Election, repeating the disappointment he had expressed last year with the agenda of the New Labour Government saying "there are many things still to do for the needy rather than the greedy in our country", he then went on to say that the election was really between Labour and Conservative, any vote for the minor parties was a vote against Labour.

Mick urged Fire Brigades Union members to support Labour on June 7th as they have made a difference over the last four years and are still the only party able to improve the lives of working people.

The last subject he covered was RESPECT.

The President stated that we still have members who are being bullied and harassed by other FBU members, he told Conference that this MUST stop and that FBU Officials must play a major part in stopping it.

He finished by telling delegates that they should respect other speakers' points of view at the Conference. All delegates are entitled to voice the views of their members and EVERYONE will then be expected to respect the Conference's decision.

Control Room mergers are not a matter solely for control staff members, but a matter for every member of the Fire Brigades Union

2001 CONFERENCE REPORT by Tam Tierney Region 1 Regional Secretary



TRADE UNIONISM IN COLOMBIA ...

Where union leaders need armoured cars

DOMINGO Tovar Arrieta (above) is a man who has survived two assassination attempts, who constantly has to change his address and who could not even tell his family he was coming to Britain to address our Conference. Why? Domingo is a senior official with the trade union CUT in Colombia.

In a speech, which earned him a standing ovation, Domingo told of death squads, anti-democratic and oligarchic governments and over 3000 trade unionists assassinated. Trade Union leaders in Colombia need to travel in armoured cars and their offices are specially protected to stave off assassination attempts. There is no such thing as collective bargaining in Colombia; trade unionists and workers are expected to accept the lowest of working conditions or face the ultimate sacrifice if they object. All of this goes on while their government welcomes the multinational companies with tales of poverty wages and no workers rights.

The role of the US, its companies and their links to the death squads were outlined by Domingo as he appealed for trade union and governmental support for the people of Colombia.

Thanking Domingo for his contribution to Conference, Andy Gilchrist assured him of the FBU's support and informed Conference that a Justice for Colombia campaign was already in place and that the Union would continue in its support for our brothers and sisters in their struggle for workers' rights.

... AND WESTERN SAHARA

25 years and 200,000 are still homeless

IN his address to Conference, Mohamed Cheik Mohamed Lehbib (below), thanked the FBU for its support, which has been constant for over 25 years when Morocco bombed the people of Western Sahara, the Saharawi, out of their homelands.

From his position as General Secretary of the trade union UGTSARIO, Mohamed gave the delegates a brief history of the situation in the area and the fact that almost 200,000 of his people have been living as refugees in tented camps in Algeria since they were forced to flee the Moroccan invasion.

Conference was told how, in 1991, after almost 16 years of war, the United Nations brokered a ceasefire between the Saharawi and the Moroccans with a promise of a referendum that would decide who rules the area. Ten years have passed; no referendum has yet taken place and the UN are dragging their heels while hundreds of thousands of people continue to live as refugees.

Mohamed asked all delegates to spare no effort in supporting the cause of the Saharawi in their efforts to achieve a free and independent Western Sahara.

Not surprisingly, Conference responded with a standing ovation.



ANNUAL CONFERENCE

RENATIONALISE THE RAILWAYS



'Support rail workers union in safety drive'

QUOTING such horrendous examples as the Paddington and Hatfield rail crashes, Mark Simmons (Kent) demanded that the next Labour Government immediately re-nationalise the national rail system. Only in this way could the needs of the travelling public be met; these needs must be put before corporate greed.

Safety systems such as Automatic Train Protection could be installed were it not for the callous greed of the companies who put profit before safety.

Mark concluded by demanding that the FBU supports the actions of ASLEF and the RMT in their efforts to bring about greater safety on all of our rail networks.

CONDEMN PRIVATISATION

Have they learned nothing from railways?

SURELY this Government has learned something from the privatisation of the railways?

Surely they are aware that privatisation has led to cost cutting and deaths?

Obviously not, because now they are going ahead with the partial privatisation of Air Traffic Control.

Against the advice of ATC operators, pilots and most who work in the industry they are rushing headlong into the next disaster area.

A rail crash is bad enough – and as firefighters we all know the horrendous consequences of such incidents – but the results of a

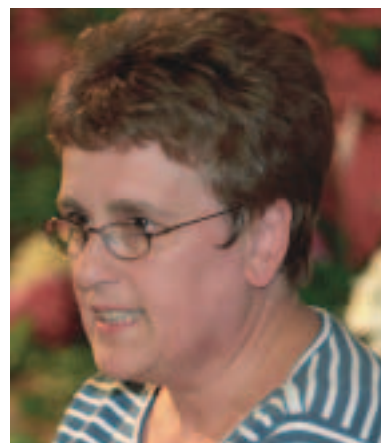
mid-air collision are too devastating to contemplate.

Trevor Shanahan (Fife) (below) demanded that all FBU members, at every level, condemn this proposed privatisation and lobby the Government to have these proposals reversed. The safety of the travelling public is paramount and must be put before profit.



ASYLUM SEEKERS

'We must combat lies about asylum seekers'



LINDA Shanahan (Fife) (above) demanded that the FBU supports the cause of asylum seekers in Great Britain and condemns any attempts by political parties, or their leaders, to exploit racism for political gain.

"Attacks on asylum seekers are rising by 200% every month" fuelled by lies about luxury accommodation and privileged conditions enjoyed by asylum seekers. The hated voucher system can hardly be seen as a privilege and in fact, places asylum seekers in a position not much better than that of a bonded slave.

Linda reminded Conference that the 1951 Geneva

Convention demanded that asylum seekers must enjoy the same conditions as the population of the country they have fled to – the Government must adopt this Convention.

John McFadden (Strathclyde) reminded Conference that only 1% of the world's global refugees ever arrive in Great Britain and urged all delegates to make this fact known to the membership. In the same vain, Paul Woolstenholmes (Suffolk) urged the Executive to begin a campaign in the branches, which would raise the awareness of the membership on this issue and supply them with the facts.

Geoff Ellis rounded off this debate by pointing to the "absolute disgrace" of some Tory MPs refusing to sign the CRE charter against racism.

INCREASING ASSAULTS

Immediate campaign to counter attacks

CONFERENCE agreed that a campaign should start immediately to counter the violent attacks against the membership in pursuit of their job. This campaign must publicise the fact that the role of the Fire Service is purely humanitarian, moved Grahame Birtley (Lothian & Borders)

John Cairns (Strathclyde) agreed with the resolution but insisted that the FBU play a major role in running any such campaign while Mark Simmons (Kent) urged that any campaign must point out the absolute neutrality of the Fire Service.

The General Secretary assured Conference that this matter would be raised with the Home Secretary as soon as possible after the election.

PAY FORMULA

Time for a rethink on pay formula

THE current Fire Service Pay Formula is "truly worthy of review" said the General Secretary.

It no longer reflects the complexity and demands of the modern role of firefighters and control staff and as such must be rethought.

Whilst acknowledging the debt of gratitude owed to those members whose long strike action won the formula, Andy said that it would be unwise at this point to abandon the formula in an attempt to return to collective bargaining for Fire Service Pay.

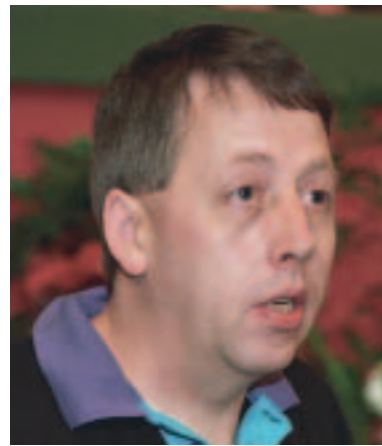
"All you have to do," he said, "is look at the plight of other public service workers."

Yes, now is the time to look for change and that change must reflect the modern nature of the service, the new technical skills required and the expectations of the membership.

On embarking on this review "we must not be fearful of the employers' position" he added but all FBU members "must be prepared to see this through to the end – with a Recall Conference if necessary."

Conference wholeheartedly endorsed this position.

MERSEYSIDE DISPUTE



'We won't let this CFO destroy us'

ONE of the most important resolutions to be put before Conference was the one concerning the situation in Merseyside and the unexplainable actions of the CFO.

The best way to sum up the debate is short and to the point.

"We won't let Saunders destroy us, we'll destroy him first" – Ian Foulkes (Merseyside) (above).

Andy Gilchrist: "The FBU will take him on and beat him. There will be only one winner, the FBU."

EMERGENCY RESOLUTION MERSEYSIDE DISPUTE

Conference condemns the actions of the Merseyside Fire Authority and Chief Fire Officer Saunders in their refusal to abide by the unanimous decisions of the National Joint Council's disputes panel.

Their blatant disregard for these unanimous decisions pose a serious threat to the existence of the National Framework for determining conditions for firefighters and control staff.

The Fire Brigades Union will resist this and any future attack on the National Joint Council by all means necessary, including strike action.

**Moved by Merseyside
Passed unanimously**

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

ROLE OF CHIEF FIRE OFFICERS

Democratic control for Fire Services must stay



THE General Secretary (above) moved the following resolution, stating that: "We will not accept the unfettered actions of unelected CFOs" and that we will use every method to resist this "including strike action." The resolution was passed unanimously.

SPEECH BY THE UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME OFFICE

This Conference notes with considerable concern the speech made by the Under Secretary of State for Home Affairs, Mike O'Brien at the LGA Fire Conference in Swansea in March 2001.

The comments made outlining a new and enhanced role for Chief Fire Officers is particularly disturbing. The Minister suggested that Chief Fire Officers would be elevated inside of Local Authority Fire Brigades to a position similar to that of Chief Constables of Police Services. This new role would also give Chief Fire Officers sole responsibility for decisions on "operational issues".

This Conference would wish to state its unequivocal opposition to these proposals and would wish to also express our determination to ensure that the UK's Fire Services remain under Local Authority control through the elected members of Fire Authorities and by this means are accountable to the public they serve and who pay for them.

In view of the criticisms of, amongst others, Chief Fire Officers contained within the Thematic Review on Equality (issued September 1999) and the Managing a Modernised Fire Service (issued 1st May 2001) this

Conference finds it incomprehensible that the future of Local Authority Fire Brigades is to be placed in their hands.

This Union will campaign vigorously to ensure this ill-thought out plan is defeated by whatever means necessary including strike action.

Moved by Executive Council

FIRST & CO-RESPONDERS

FBU members will not take part in schemes



IN opening the debate on this matter and recommending that FBU members did not participate in any first or co-responder schemes, National Officer Geoff Ellis (above) pointed out some of the many flaws and pitfalls in such practices.

Should FBU members cover for a badly underfunded Ambulance Service?

Are FBU members as efficient at medical matters as Ambulance workers?

Should FBU members and the Service in general, take on more skilled work without funding?

Who responds to fire calls while FBU members are doing Ambulance work?

Would FBU members have to take out individual liability insurance in case they are sued?

During the debate that followed Conference heard Gary Jones (Devon) tell of how a co-responding scheme and the use of defibrillators was launched in his Brigade after management pulled out of negotiations with the FBU.

He told how members who refused to take part in such schemes were transferred and placed under investigation due to "allegations" made against them.

Gary urged the Conference to refuse to accept these duties but to unite against the possible consequences.

Tam McFarlane (Somerset) called any such schemes a “bloody disgrace” and warned that working with defibrillators was the first step on the road to first and co-responding schemes. These “selfish and short-sighted” schemes will cause the loss of Ambulance jobs and must be resisted at all costs.

Conference agreed unanimously that FBU members would not take part!

THE FBU MOVING FORWARD

Rule change will ensure proper representation

THE FBU took a big step forward at this Conference by adopting a rule change which will ensure Executive Council members for Women, Black and Ethnic Minority and Retained members.

Andy Gilchrist, in opening this debate, admitted that it had not been an easy road to get to this stage but pointed out that previous Conferences and Officials at all levels had worked hard to ensure proper representation for all in the FBU.

This rule change is about the “politics of equality”, “the fight for human rights” and the achievement of “socialist equality”. “Everyone should have a voice”, he said “and everyone should be listened to.”

This rule change had been brought to Conference as a direct result of previous Conference decisions and to reject it now would be a victory for bigots; defeating this rule change would “put up a no entry sign for the Fire Service”.

During the debate.

Val Salmon (CSNC) urged delegates to remove their blinkers “and allow the sections to join the mainstream”.

“The sections cannot be ignored any longer,” said Kerry Baigent (NWC) in urging support.

“This will help us to eliminate the RFU,” said Tam Mitchell (NRC)

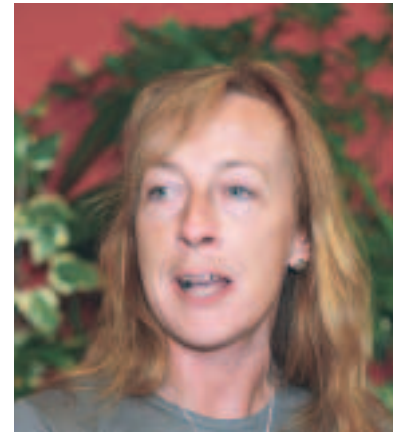
John McDonald (Strathclyde) spoke against the rule change on a mandate from his membership but said that “racists, sexists and homophobes should be kicked out of the FBU.”

“The sections must be able to play a full role in the FBU at all levels,” said Alan Blackley (Cleveland)

Ian Anderson (Dumfries & Galloway) said that he was mandated to vote against this rule change but insisted that his members will always work for fairness at work.

Pierre Marsh (B&EMM) supported the resolution stating, “All human beings need human rights.”

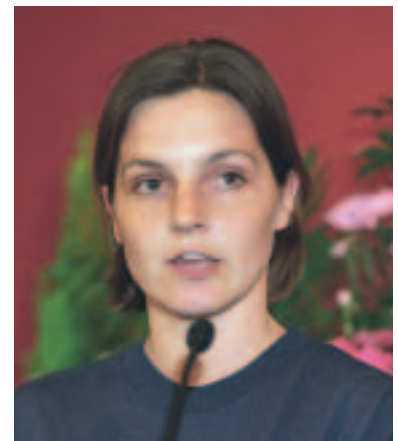
Conference agreed this change to the rules.



Val Salmon:
remove blinkers



Tam Mitchell:
this will help us to eliminate the RFU



Kerry Baigent:
sections cannot be ignored any longer



Pierre Marsh:
all human beings need human rights

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

MINISTER'S SPEECH

The UK Fire Service is 'arguably the best in the world'



THOSE were the words used by Mike O'Brien, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Home Office, to describe the British Fire Service. The Service was, he said, one of the most consistently high performing services in the UK and that this Government was trying hard to ensure capabilities, resources, equipment and training to ensure that the Fire Service remained that way. The Government will do more for the Fire Service when it can, he said.

To this end, Conference was informed of the Government's intention to produce a white paper on the Fire Service and assured that all legitimate issues will be addressed through discussion. However, the Government must always consider value for money; therefore, closer contact with other services will have to be investigated. Not to worry though, the Fire Service is a separate Service – not a substitute for the Ambulance Service or Police – and “we will protect that role.”

Management, the workforce and Government will have to work together to achieve a broad consensus about the future direction of the Service. Management must always realise that the opinions of their workers count and to ensure this it may even be necessary to train management in industrial relations. (Much ironic applause)

The Under Secretary then proceeded to heap praise on the FBU for our work in many areas and once again assured Conference that more investment will follow with the return of the next Labour Government.

Of course, we will have to work closer with other Local Authority services and other Emergency Services – but it's ok they will protect the role of the Fire Service.

Mike O'Brien addresses the Conference

WHOLETIME RETAINED

Community spirit or fundamental greed

JIM Parrot (East Sussex) (right) bravely moved a resolution asking for a review of the Union's stance on the wholetime retained duty system. This he argued was needed because some communities in rural areas could not attract retained firefighters and therefore, it would be a good thing if wholetime members who lived in these communities could perform retained duties in the areas where they lived.

The pitfalls of such a system were explained by several delegates but best summed up by Tennyson Turney

(Cambridgeshire) who pointed out that the desire to carry out such duties had nothing to do with a desire to serve the community but was driven by “fundamental greed”.



BEST VALUE

We must ensure that all members are consulted

MOVING the Executive Council's statement on Best Value, the General Secretary said that while all evidence showed that Best Value meant cuts by another name, it was part of the Government's third way politics and very much a live issue.

Andy informed Conference that the Union needed to collect and collate all available information on Best value and then educate all members on the increasing demands on the Service. We must also ensure that, along with Best Value, the membership is treated fairly and with respect as key providers of Best Value.

While we support quality of service as a key priority we must ensure that all members are consulted – through the FBU – to ensure that their pay and conditions reflect the expectations demanded of them.

The General Secretary warned that attacks on Conditions of Service, fire cover, establishments, Controls etc, will result in strike action. Best value will not be used to treat FBU members as citizens of the 18th century, we will stand squarely as citizens of the 21st century.

FIRE COVER REVIEW



We must ensure that all members are consulted

IN a warning to Conference, Mike Fordham briefly outlined the Fire Cover Review, which is currently underway. Mike could have explained it in extreme detail but he gauged rightly that none of the delegates were prepared to stay in Bridlington for an extra two days.

This review will bring about fundamental changes in the Fire Service and could even see changes in Conditions of Service, Duty

TUC PRESIDENT



Much, much, much more to do for Labour

BILL Morris, President of the TUC, opened his pre-election contribution by telling Conference that if William Hague is the answer then it must have been a really stupid question.

He acknowledged that many people had wanted the Labour Government to carry out more radical reforms but reminded Conference of the dangerously damaged society that Labour had inherited from the Tories in 1997. He agreed that Labour had achieved some positive steps but insisted that there was "much, much, much more to do." He demanded for example that the Government takes a much stronger stand against multi-national companies when they decide to up stakes and move to cheaper countries, leaving a wake of redundancies in their trail. The Government must change its attitude to asylum seekers and end the demeaning voucher system.

All unions should combine together to defend high quality public services on behalf of the communities we represent. The TUC he said "will continue to promote trade unionism and continue to support all working people."

Bill ended by urging a vote for Labour at the forthcoming election thus giving them a critical second term – crucial to the wellbeing of the country.

Systems and all that is considered the norm in today's Service.

Mike urged that a series of seminars begins immediately, throughout the country, to educate all Officials and members about the serious implications of this review.

You have been warned – insist that these seminars take place in your area.

FIRE SAFETY POLICY

Developing a fire safety policy in the UK and European Community



Mike Fordham
Assistant General
Secretary

1. AIMS

The Executive Council recognises and agrees the need to have a clearly established policy on the development of a fire safe environment throughout the UK and the European Union for the protection of our members and the communities that we serve.

"The Fire Brigades Union proposes to promote and develop within the UK and throughout the European Union the concept of a fire safe society and strategic fire safety culture for the protection and preservation of life, the reduction of injuries, the protection of property and the preservation of the environment, from the causes and effects of fire. We believe that firefighters should form an integral part of such a fire safety culture"

"To develop a fire safe society and strategic fire safety culture we intend to use the professional expertise of our members through the promotion, development and introduction of such UK and pan European legislation, strategic bodies, inter-Governmental strategies, policies, guidance and products that will combine to achieve that aim."

"We will work towards these goals, in a spirit of equal partnership, with those bodies, groups and individuals, who will assist us in achieving a society that is safe from fire."

2. DEVELOPING THE STRATEGY

To attain the strategic objectives set out in the policy statement of intent it will be necessary for the FBU to form alliances and equal partnerships, either on a permanent, or temporary basis, with other groups and bodies within the UK and within the wider European sphere of interest, where our objectives and agendas are mutually compatible. The reasoning for this is as follows.

Firstly, the fire authorities in the UK have since 1961, following the Keighley Mills factory fire in Yorkshire, enjoyed an enforcement role in fire safety where their expertise and professionalism is recognised and generally appreciated, particularly by the general public. This twin track approach of Fire Service intervention and fire safety enforcement has worked well in the UK, however, in other parts of Europe the Fire Service intervention role takes primacy and some Fire Services have no fire safety involvement at all. This role is usually discharged by engineers, sometimes employed by the Fire Service (as in Scandinavian Countries), but more often by those public bodies that are the equivalent of UK Local Authorities.

Secondly, whilst the fire safety enforcement role of the fire authorities in the UK relate primarily to the life safety protection of the general public from fire, in many areas there is a clear and undeniable overlap into the safety of firefighters. This is an issue that we have recognised for 10 years now and is one that is just beginning to be appreciated by other groups and Government departments.

The Building Regulations and Building Standards throughout the UK and probably more importantly, the guidance supporting those Regulations and Standards, offer an entry level of fire safety protection for buildings which, are newly constructed, or have undergone material alterations and extensions, or have been subject to a material change of use.

Part of the requirements of the Building Regulations and Standards relate to the provision of adequate access and facilities for the Fire Service to assist them in rescue and firefighting. These requirements are then developed in the guidance to the Regulations and Standards. The FBU has so far been extremely

successful in gaining improvements to this guidance and we are involved with a number of bodies including the British Standards Institution in drafting further guidance.

Having said that, it must also be understood that any improvements in fire safety measures encompassed by the Building Regulations and Standards are of a long-term effect upon the safety of the public and firefighters. However, we are building a better long-term future for both the general public and firefighters.

The same philosophy and principles of FBU involvement extend into the worlds of fire research and testing. The FBU has, once again, become a main player in these areas, where our views on behalf of firefighters are recognised, if not always appreciated, by everyone.

High profile issues that we have dealt with or are involved with still, are those of large insulated sandwich panels, external cladding systems for buildings (where Glyn Evans chaired a BSI Committee) and very large single storey warehouses.

Much of the work in the UK of achieving our policy aims and objectives has already been carried forward. To date, the FBU in association with other UK groups and bodies has achieved the following fire safety aims;

- (a) the removal of proposals by the previous Government to transfer all responsibility for fire safety enforcement from fire authorities to Local Authorities; and
- (b) the creation of a UK wide Fire Safety Advisory Board at Governmental level; and
- (c) the introduction of stop gap Regulations to implement the fire safety elements of the EC Framework and Workplace Directives and
- (d) UK Government proposals for a single all encompassing general Fire Safety Bill; and
- (e) the recognition and acceptance by Ministers that the safety of firefighters is an issue for the UK Building Regulations and Building Standards to take into account; and
- (f) the preparation by the British Standards Institution of one national set of design guides for general fire safety in buildings; and
- (g) the tacit acceptance by Government departments that those design guides when issued as full British Standards will be accepted by them as guidance for regulatory purposes.

However, it will be necessary to now develop these issues in the broader context of Europe. The reason for this is simple. More and more the activities of the European Commission and the European Parliament and Directives produced by them will lead to a standardisation of laws and standards across Europe to enable the free movement of goods and workers across national boundaries.

It would be foolish of us to believe that fire issues in the UK will not be affected by the activities of Europe. The UK has already introduced fire safety regulations, albeit as a stopgap measure, into the UK (the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997) to satisfy the requirements of two EC Directives. So the European writing is already on the UK wall.

European Standards are now being introduced into the UK Building Regulations and Standards. Work on a British Standard document cannot now be commenced if work is already under way on that subject in a CEN Committee. The International Standards Organisation (ISO) and CEN have an agreement whereby they are working towards a harmonisation of standards.

A number of the Directorates of the European Commission contain fire references within them. Fire issues are however, as fragmented and dispersed through the EC Directorates as they are through the UK Government departments and there is no central point of contact, or decision making. This means unfortunately, that, as in the UK until the creation of the Fire Safety Advisory Board, there is no strategic fire safety advisory body that can take an overview of fire issues, at the centre of the European Commission.

The primary objective of the FBU in Europe, in conjunction with other like-minded bodies, must be to create a strategic fire safety body that sits at the centre of European Commission, much in the way that we have lobbied for and achieved the creation of the Fire Safety Advisory Board in the UK.

Such a European body could exist outside the Commission initially, but the ultimate aim must be to see it created as a statutory advisory body to the European Commission on fire matters. Such a body would have to include representatives of the Trade Unions representing firefighters throughout Europe, particularly if the FBU was a main player in creating such a body.

The aim of the body should be to ensure that all those who have a legitimate interest in fire safety matters have a place where they can air their views so that long-term strategic decisions about future fire safety strategies for Europe (and thus the UK) can be planned. Once agreement in principle has been reached for the creation of such a body then its constitution, membership and terms of reference, will need to be carefully considered.

The European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) has already lent its support and backing for the creation of a European Fire Safety Body. Following the explosion in a firework warehouse in the Dutch city of Enschede which caused widespread destruction and a number of fatalities including firefighters, the General Secretary of EPSU, Carola Fischbach-Pyttel, wrote directly on 24 May 2000 to the President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, requesting the creation of such a body and seeking a meeting with him to discuss this issue. A delegation has subsequently met the European Commissioner with responsibility for Public Protection and the FBU led this delegation.

We also know that there are also other organisations within the UK fire community who have European Associations who are already able to see the advantages of a European fire safety body and are preparing to take the concept forward but in their own model.

The FBU therefore, has to have the long term strategic view necessary to play a leading part in this issue otherwise we run the risk, as in the past, of being left behind and then having later to expend large amounts of resources, both human and financial, trying to sort out the mess other people have created.

FIRE SAFETY POLICY

3. REPRESENTATION

Within the current UK system the FBU is represented on a number of Government bodies, working groups and British Standards Institution and HSE Committees. The FBU is now seen by many in Government, including Ministers, as a leading and key player in fire safety issues and also a welcome and reliable source of good quality and pragmatic advice on fire safety issues. They also recognise and respect the FBU's adherence to traditional Trade Union principles and socialist beliefs.

However, this level of representation and the consequential workload and resource requirement that it throws up is growing, whilst this is to be welcomed in that it reflects the status of the FBU in these matters, it must be managed carefully. Equally, there are still some in the Fire Service community, fortunately a dwindling minority, that believe the FBU has exceeded its remit and stolen their clothes and their place in their perception of the overall sphere of Fire Service things.

It is significant that CACFOA has recently decided to retain the services of Graham Butler, recently retired ex Deputy Chief Fire Officer of Tyne and Wear Fire Brigade, as their fire safety adviser in the same way that we have retained Glyn Evans as the FBU fire safety adviser. The Executive Council recognises that continuity in many of these issues is absolutely crucial to long term success and achievement of aim.

Clearly, therefore, there is a necessity to maintain both continuity of representation, principles and philosophy in fire safety issues, this the FBU is seen as being very good at. One well-known and respected Fire Service commentator once remarked that only the FBU played the long-term game so successfully.

Current FBU fire safety representation is shown in the table on the right.

4. CONSULTATION

The consultation process in which the FBU is involved on many fire safety issues or overlapping general health and safety issues comes about in many ways. All UK Government departments maintain consultation lists which they use when they are sending documents out for public consultation rounds, the FBU features on many of these lists, particularly those at Home Office, DETR, DTI, Scottish Executive, HSC and HSE.

We also monitor Government department web sites for information on their proposals and activities. Our political advisers also monitor the political situation at Westminster and elsewhere for us. With the effects of devolution now beginning to be felt on fire safety issues it has become even more important to maintain a strategic watch on political developments not only in Westminster, but also in Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast.

Due to the FBU's status in fire safety matters, we are also often approached by outside bodies to participate in fire safety campaigns and consultation exercises with them, or alerted to them by those bodies.

The consultation process often generates a considerable

Fire Protection Association	Executive Committee	Mike Fordham
	Training Sub Committee	Glyn Evans
	Domestic Smoke Alarm Initiative	Glyn Evans
Arson Control Forum		Mike Fordham
	Intervention Sub Group	Ian Shaw (sub)
	Legislation Sub Group	Ian Shaw Glyn Evans
Fire Safety Advisory Board		Mike Fordham Ian Shaw (sub)
Fire Safety Advisory Board Working Groups	Fire Safety Legislation Working Group	Glyn Evans Ian Shaw (sub)
	Community Fire Safety Sub Group	Ian Shaw Glyn Evans (sub)
	Cost of Fire Sub Group	Nil representation
	Standards Sub Group	Ian Shaw
	Scottish Fire Safety Advisory Board Sub Committee	John Wynn, Region 1
Home Office Working Groups	Generic Risk Assessment Working Group	Glyn Evans
DETR/BRE/FRS Working Groups	Means of Escape and Security	Glyn Evans
	Smoke Ventilation Shafts	Glyn Evans
Joint CACFOA/FBU Initiatives	Fire Safety in Very Large Single Storey warehouses	Glyn Evans
	Scottish Fire Safety Bill	Glyn Evans and Region 1 Fire Safety Sub Committee
	CACFOA Community Fire Safety Committee	Graham Jones, ONC Region 12
HSE Committees/Working Groups	ACDS Flammable Substances Sub Committee	Glyn Evans
National Fire Sprinkler Network		Mike Fordham and Glyn Evans
British Standards Institution Committees	FSH/14 – Fire Precautions in Buildings	Ian Shaw
	FSH/14/21, FSH/14/22, FSH/14/24	Ian Shaw
	FSH/14/23 – Fire Service Access and Facilities	Graham Jones, ONC Region 12
	FSH/18 – Fixed Firefighting Systems	Paul Smyth, ONC Region 2
	FSH/21/7 & 22/7 – Reaction to Fire	Glyn Evans
	FSH/24/6 – Fire Service Intervention	Graham Jones, ONC Region 12

workload as Government consultation documents particularly, do not tend to be insignificant documents. They are often small books in their own right. These require not just a comprehensive and detailed response from us, but also considerable research and assessment of the probable long-term impact of the proposals upon the general public, our members and the Fire Services before the response is finally drafted.

One recent HSC consultation document on proposals relating to the future of gas safety in the UK contained over 80 questions for respondents to consider and answer, some of which were further sub divided into parts. Once again to ensure continuity of approach to consultation processes it is important to ensure that a strategic view is being taken of all current issues and indeed past ones.

Internal consultation and discussion on fire safety issues takes place currently between Glyn Evans, Fire Safety Advisor; Ian Shaw, ONC Chair; and the ONC Fire Safety Sub-Committee. There are no scheduled meetings of the group, they meet normally on an ad hoc basis as and when the need arises and usually on the afternoon before an ONC Meeting. Glyn also meets regularly with the Region 1 Officers Committee and their Fire Safety Sub-Committee. This ensures that a two-way dialogue is established and maintained.

With the reforming of the Northern Ireland Assembly a similar situation now needs to be considered in Region 2.

Similarly, as the FBU proposes to create Sub-Committees of the Health and Safety Committee to deal with certain aspects of the Fire Service and its role, there will need to be a close liaison between those Sub-Committees and the FBU fire safety advisers.

5. CAMPAIGNS

In the future we see that the role of the FBU in campaigns on fire safety issues will not be simply left to the fire safety advisers, the Regions and the ONC to take forward. Other FBU sections and the members at grass roots level will have an important role to play in these issues and act as a conduit to the communities and groups that they represent.

The campaigns that the FBU has been involved with have undoubtedly served to improve the safety of firefighters in the long term. The victory in achieving, through amendments to the Building Regulations, the requirement for sprinklers to be installed in single storey supermarkets over 2,000m² in England and Wales means that the unnecessary deaths of and injuries to firefighters in such premises, like that of Fleur Lombard and the firefighters in Dover should become a thing of the past. There is however, still much to be done and currently the fire safety world is an extremely active one.

Equally both the fire safety role of the Fire Service and the role of firefighters in legislative fire safety issues need to be maintained. Failure to do so not only means a loss of enforcement over fire safety legislation, or involvement in fire safety issues, which could materially affect the safety of our operational members, but also lead to an increased risk to the public.

Decimation of legislative fire safety departments in the dash for community fire safety could lead to the destruction of the risk

based approach to fire cover which has the potential to offer significant advantages to FBU members over the existing property based fire cover standards.

We shall also need to monitor closely developments in the national Parliaments and Assemblies that have served to create three more bodies that have delegated powers in respect of fire matters. We hope, with the assistance of Region 1 to pursue a Scottish Fire Safety bill in co-operation with CACFOA (Scotland). It may be that a similar opportunity will present itself in Northern Ireland which, because of its previous constitutional set up, has always tended to lag behind the rest of the UK in introducing health and safety and fire safety legislation.

We also need to maintain an active and effective presence at Westminster, which is where the role of our political advisers, Westminster Advisers, has been crucial over the last eight years and remains so for the foreseeable future. Westminster Advisers have been able to provide us with an unrivalled access to MPs and Members of the House of Lords whom we would not normally be able to contact, or impress, through conventional Trade Union and Labour Party roots. They are also an irreplaceable route into the wider Fire Industry.

It is both welcome and significant that the FBU is now viewed within Government and Parliamentary circles as a major player in and contributor to Parliamentary fire safety matters, something other Fire Service organisations have been unable to emulate, much to their annoyance.

This position of authority must not be allowed to slip.

6. ACCOUNTABILITY

Currently, responsibility and accountability for fire safety issues on a day-to-day basis flows through the Assistant General Secretary to the Executive Council and ultimately to Annual Conference. Part of the Executive Council's Annual Report to Conference relates to development and achievements in the fire safety arena.

Our fire safety advisers report in the first instance to the AGS and regular briefing meetings are held.

Policy on fire safety issues is often developed as they arise and in line with other related FBU policies, however, Annual Conference has, on a number of occasions, reiterated their commitment to a membership and Fire Service involvement and role in general fire safety and community fire safety.

7. RESOURCES

As has been said at various stages throughout this document the work that the FBU is involved with on fire safety issues is resource intensive. This manifests itself in three ways there is the;

1. human resource factor;
2. the administrative resource factor; and
3. the financial resource needed to fund the first two resources.

The Executive will continue to closely monitor the resources required to sustain our involvement in Fire Safety matters and would encourage and welcome the involvement of members and officials in this activity.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Depression: the silent killer

WHO needs more than two hours sleep a night? What's wrong with drinking 15 pints a day? So you rant and rave over what others consider trivialities, what's wrong with that? Your memory has started to fade, but that's just your age. You're becoming obsessed with various issues, but that's just because they're infinitely important, more so than anyone else can understand. So you've started to neglect your close friends and family. Can't they see how important your work is?

Depression? You, depressed? Rubbish! Depression is for weaklings, you're not weak. Just pull yourself together, have a few more pints, you'll be OK.

If this sounds familiar I would recommend that you seek help, because if it is depression, regardless of how tough you think you are, you are suffering from a potentially life threatening illness.

I wasn't suffering from depression; I just had a lot on. So much on, that one morning I woke up at 3am and decided to jump in front of a 38-tonne truck. Miraculously, I bounced off and lived. Suffering head injuries, I spent the next three months in a psychiatric unit, part of that time sectioned under the Mental Health Act.

Stress management is vitally important, but I believe that prevention is better than cure. Stress recognition, both in our comrades and ourselves, needs to be given more attention. Look for character changes, examine drinking habits, be aware of changing sleep patterns, but above all, listen to your true friends.

I am lucky; far luckier than the poor lost souls I left behind in the psychiatric intensive care unit. Far luckier than those who were successful (if that is the right word), in their suicide attempts. You, or your comrade may not be as lucky as I was. Please look for the tell-tale signs. Canvass for more Union awareness and recognition courses. Consider the stresses of being one of only five women

firefighters in a Brigade of 1,500 men. Consider the stresses of being a black or ethnic member in a sea of white faces. Consider why gay and lesbian members are reluctant to come out and more importantly, challenge behaviour that makes anybody's life more difficult than it already is.

Depression is an unacceptable illness, not a proper working class illness like cancer for instance. Curiously enough, once upon a time, cancer was treated with equal misunderstanding. Cancer wards were set up in complete separation from other wards, pushed aside and isolated from people with "acceptable", "understandable" illnesses. It should therefore come as no surprise that psychiatric units are now established in the same manner, after all, psychiatric patients have to be kept away from "normal people" don't they?

Education and promoting a greater understanding of the illness might one day help people to recognise that mental ill health, like cancer, is totally indiscriminate, striking rich and poor alike, hitting out at human beings from every walk of life. Many cases are treatable and there are recognisable symptoms. As with cancer, there are ways to reduce the risks.

Finally, my slow progress has been assisted by a considerable number of men and women, work comrades who know who they are. Words cannot express my gratitude to them. Whilst criticism of unacceptable behaviour is important, so too is praise and recognition of the wonderful nature of the vast majority of our membership. I look forward to the day when clowns like the ACO who coined the phrase, "It's business not personal" (Brother Pat Tyler's letter, Volume 29 – No. 3), are eradicated from our profession. Views like those should be treated with justifiable contempt.



Dave Buckney

Ex-Brigade Official – Merseyside

WHOLETIME RETAINED

Wholetime retained What's the problem?



Mark Simmons
Brigade Chair Kent

ALONG with a Brigade Official from a neighbouring Brigade I've been tasked with investigating six members reported under rule for allegedly carrying out wholetime retained duties within our Region.

Two of these members have indicated that they weren't aware of the reasons and history behind the Union's stance on banning wholetime retained.

I've got to say I find that difficult to believe, even so I feel drawn to putting pen to paper and reiterating the sentiments and reasons behind our policy.

For the majority of members it's old hat and you may wish to turn the page and move onto the next article. For some you may want refreshing on the arguments. But for a small minority of members out there I'd urge you to take time out to read this and understand that if

you wish to undertake wholetime retained duties you will be in breach of Union policy and could be expelled.

Wholetime retained began in 1961, as part of a pay package for that year. The Union was forced to accept wholetime retained into the Fire Service with the employers using the argument of 'difficulties in recruiting retained'. With an element of truth in this recruitment problem, it still must be borne in mind that an important factor at this time was our employers deliberately suppressing wages of full time firefighters, due to wages being supplemented by shift overtime or wholetime retained duties.

What this in effect led to was our employers giving and the Union at the time accepting astonishingly low pay awards due to being lumbered with this system.

In 1961 there were a total of 916 wholetime firefighters with retained obligations. In 1963 the number was 1,683 and by 1973 the number had increased to 3,630. The impetus and will to recruit retained firefighters had predictably disappeared.

The disunity that a system designed only to operate for a few rural Brigades was evident. Inside these Brigades individual rivalry over earnings, with pay slips being waved in front of those not prepared or not able to do the system, led to bickering, jealousy and even punch-ups in fire stations.

These divisions allowed management to run riot and more importantly working wholetime retained and overtime made sure that a basic poverty wage with the obvious small pension to follow kept firefighters amongst the poorest section of workers.

Fire Authorities exploited the situation by undermining

establishment levels, with their unwillingness to recruit. They remained dependent on staff working overtime and wholetime retained to fill the staffing gaps.

In 1974 Annual Conference agreed to seek an end to the wholetime retained system, in an effort to drive down working hours and better the conditions of service. The successful reduction in working hours created approximately 3,000 additional jobs in the UK Fire Service at that time. And

with the removal of our employers' bargaining weapon, the way was paved for the fight for a decent living wage.

This culminated in the national strike of 1977 and the introduction of a pay formula. At this point in time all references to wholetime retained duties within the Grey Book were deleted.

In 1986 the employers approached the Union with a view to again introduce wholetime retained, with the same argument of difficulties in recruiting retained in a limited number of Brigades. The Union agreed to sit on a working party set up to examine all the

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Wholetime retained What's the problem?

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

relevant problems associated with recruitment and retention and the wholetime retained system.

Unfortunately the employers used this to force through an 'open ended' reintroduction of the system. With no boundaries or rules to the implementation of wholetime retained, it's inevitable this would lead to reductions in establishments, or job losses. An example of this abuse when wholetime retained was being worked in my own Brigade is that at busy multipump stations the second pump was crewed by wholetime retained. With the removal of the system watches had to be increased to crew the second pump

The employers at this time again failed to deal with the major issue, which was the recruitment and retention in a limited number of Brigades.

At a Recall Conference on 13 February 1991, the employers' 'open ended' proposal was rejected. Along with this a recommendation was carried to commence a campaign to eradicate from the Fire Service the wholetime retained duty system as per the National Agreement.

The Union has fought over many years for its members to have proper remuneration and decent working hours, which reflect a modern day Fire Service. Employers and Governments have attempted during the same period, to lead us back to the 1940s and 1950s.

If the employers care that much about the Retained Service then they would give a commitment to it through proper investment. Wholetime members giving retained cover is not the answer. It cannot be the answer all the time there are no assurances over establishment figures and assurances that this divisive system will never seep into our pay formula.

I implore any member out there thinking about doing wholetime retained to think again. Not just of the consequences of breaking democratically conceived policies of our Union, but of the devastating effect this duty system can have upon our Fire Service.

Let's maintain this cornerstone of FBU policy, as your wages, jobs and conditions, depend on your loyalty – and not on the selective greed of individuals.

TAX

Working families tax credit – is it for me?

AS A public sector employee have you asked yourself the question "Working Families Tax Credit: Is it for me?" There are many people working in Government departments who are eligible for Working Families Tax Credit, but haven't claimed or even found out if they are eligible.

WFTC provides extra cash help for working families on low and middle incomes, over a million families are benefiting now. The Inland Revenue, which administers WFTC, wants to make sure that all public sector workers who are eligible are encouraged to apply.

You could be entitled to WFTC if you:

- Work 16 hours or more per week.
- Have children under 16, or 19 if they are in full time education and live with you.
- Have savings less than £8,000.
- Are a UK resident.

Similarly to the way WFTC helps working families, the Disabled Persons Tax Credit helps those with an illness or disability who are in work. You are eligible for DPTC if you:

- Work 16 hours or more per week.
- Are receiving one of a range of qualifying benefits or have been receiving certain benefits in the 182 days prior to your application.
- Have savings of £16,000 or less.
- Are a UK resident.

Both WFTC and DPTC can also help you with childcare costs as well. If you qualify for either and have a child or children for whom you pay eligible childcare. You could receive up to 70% of your eligible childcare costs, of up to £100 per week (meaning you would receive £70) for one child or up to £150 per week for two children or more (you receive £105).

Inland Revenue

ON THE MOVE?

Members are reminded to advise their Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address. Head Office should be advised of any changes of next of kin or nominations for benefits.



SCOTTISH TUC



Region 1 Executive Council Member John McGhee and Tam Tierney, Regional Secretary, voting at the STUC

Below: President Mick Harper, Region 1 Chair Roddy Robertson and Janette Ferguson, Region 1 women's rep

Control room issues get an airing at Scottish TUC

THE STUC Congress took place in Aberdeen this year and was held between 9 and 12 April. The Aberdeen Music Hall was the venue and delegates were welcomed back to this beautiful setting after an absence of some 12 years.

Janette Ferguson, FBU National Women's Committee, spoke in support of a Prison Officers' Association resolution against privatised prisons. No one and that means every delegate in the hall, knows quite how she did it but Janette managed to centre most of her speech around Emergency Service Control amalgamations. Maybe it was because Grampian Fire Board had just come out in favour of single controls. Anyway, the resolution was passed unanimously.

Roddy Robertson, No 1 Region Chair, moved the Union's own resolution on a Fire Safety Bill for Scotland. Using guidance supplied by Glyn Evans, the Union's Fire Safety adviser, Roddy outlined the very strong case for separate legislation in Scotland. He was ably seconded in this task by a delegate from Inverness Trades Council who just happened to be Fraser Parr, Brigade Chair, Highland & Islands FBU. Unanimous again.

International day at the Congress saw the FBU reminding everyone that we believe that life does not stop outwith Fire Service property.

John McGhee, No 1 Region EC member, moved the FBU resolution in support of continued and increased links with South Africa. John gave a detailed and moving account of a recent Trade Union delegation to South Africa and once seconded by UNISON this resolution was also accepted unanimously.

Stewart Brown, FBU National G&L Secretary, seconded the



NUM's resolution on the Cuba Support Campaign while Tam Tierney, No 1 Region Secretary, moved the Union's own emergency resolution on Western Sahara – both unanimous.

The General Secretary spoke in support of a massive composite motion on Public Sector Funding. No one knows quite how he managed it but Andy managed to centre most of his contribution around Emergency Service Control amalgamations while demanding appropriate, increased funding for all Fire Service functions and the Public Sector in general.

Mick Harper, the President (and ex Regional Treasurer) and Jock Munro, No 1 Region Treasurer, seemed to spend the entire week speaking on a subject dear to Treasurers' hearts – FBU funding.

The Union's delegates to Congress showed, once again, that not only do we support other workers in this country but that we are also fully aware of our responsibility to people in struggle all over the world.

Tam Tierney

TUC WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

Culmination of a busy month for FBU women

ANOTHER busy March for FBU Women, with the National Women's School at Wortley Hall in Sheffield, International Women's Day and then straight to Scarborough for the 2001 Women's TUC Conference!

The Conference was held in the Spa Conference Hall, Scarborough, between the 14 and 16 March. The event was attended by 268 Women delegates and the theme for this year was pensions.

The FBU delegation were:

EC Member Ruth Winters; NWC Secretary Vicky Knight; NWC Chair Dona Feltham; Kerry Baigent; Jeanette Ferguson; Yannick Dubois; Jane Clarke; Sam Gordon; visitor – Joanne Evans.

Female representation was made by all possible sections of our membership, including, Firefighters, Control Operators, B&EMM and Gay and Lesbian groups. All delegates actively participated and spoke brilliantly on a wide range of issues, including:

- **Health and Safety** – calling the Government to give the HSE the resources to enforce regs and broaden its advisory and preventative work.
- **The Feminisation of Poverty** – calling for amongst other things, better benefits for lone parents, support for carers, stronger equal pay laws, restoration of student grants and nursery provision for all.
- **Domestic Violence** – a code of practice for employers.
- **Work and parents** – promoting family friendly policies for ALL workers, by right.
- **Promoting Public Services** – demanding consultation, recognition, adequate funding and accountability by all Services.

The FBU again, bringing its element of internationalism with not just our main resolution, which was Peace in Palestine, but also with our emergency resolution which was on the Western Sahara – UK arms trade with Morocco. We also seconded a Resolution on Health and Safety for the FDA Union after an amendment making corporate manslaughter a major issue within this, raising awareness of the legal challenge and our open verdict, a victory for all our members.

All of our contributions were well received and widely reported in The Morning Star during the week.

Vice President Ruth Winters represented the Union speaking at a fringe meeting on Cuba, where, for the first time, they had been able to send a delegate to speak from the platform. The FMC (Federacion de Mujeres Cubanas) speaker Alicia Gonzales



FBU delegation to the TUC women's conference with Alicia G from Cuba

gave a 10-minute contribution to the WTUC and rapturous applause ensued, quickly followed by a standing ovation (not a usual occurrence!)

Alicia depicted the Cuban Women's Trade Union Movement (approximately 6.5million members) as something we should aspire to in this country. Strong links were forged between our two organisations and the NWC will continue to work with the Cuba Solidarity Campaign and the FMC to achieve the best we can for workers all over the world.

At TUC in Glasgow last year, you may remember, it was agreed that one motion from the Women's TUC Conference would go directly onto the main Congress Agenda each year. The chosen resolution this year is to be on Equal Pay and the Women's Committee look forward to a positive outcome from that debate.

The TUC Women's Committee was as always elected from the Conference by the delegates and the FBU were again successful. Vicky Knight will sit on the Women's Committee on behalf of the Fire Brigades Union for the year 2001/2.

The National Women's Committee would like to express their thanks to Ruth for her year of hard work and dedication to all things TUC – keeping our issues on the agenda, which I am sure that Vicky will continue to do over the next 12 months! We will continue to try and keep the FBU in the high esteem that it is always regarded at such events.

Guest speakers this year were John Monks, Bill Morris and Baroness Jay.

Black and white in the red

Bob Pounder
Brigade Secretary GMC

THE Thatcher years almost succeeded in destroying the radical theatre movement, but not quite. Like her acolyte Sir Keith Joseph who took it upon himself to remove the vestiges of academic Marxism from the Open University's social science foundation course, Margaret Thatcher understood the power of ideas. There can be no question that it was her appeal to racism and nationalism that marginalised the Nation Front and helped bring the Tories to power in 1979.

Twenty-two years later Banner Theatre under the leadership of Dave Rogers and Fred Wisdom supported by the Fire Brigades Union are delivering a powerful anti-racist message into the heart of the Fire Service establishment. In the tradition of political theatre, their production 'Black and White in the Red' provides a unique and dynamic medium that can capture and motivate an audience. The Banner Theatre road show has appeared for the FBU at Wortley Hall and received accolades from Fire Service venues in Essex, the West Midlands and Lancashire.

In a ground breaking collaborative approach the FBU, Northwest Arts Board and the Greater Manchester Fire Authority hosted the same theatre production at the training centre on Thursday March 29 2001. An audience of approximately one hundred was drawn into an effervescence of rock and folk rhythms, songs, commentary, voice-overs and sardonic wit.

Ironically enough it was at this training centre where a very senior officer in 1998 informed a black recruit, Curtis McLardie (amongst others) that he "would rather be gay than black".

This incident erupted into one of the biggest race rows the North West had ever seen, drawing the FBU in a gesture of solidarity into unofficial industrial action. The matter was finally resolved at an Employment Tribunal in March 2000 where the GMC Brigade was found to be in breach of the Race Relations Act.

Without question such tumultuous events have effected a sea



Fred Wisdom and Dave Rogers from Banner Theatre

change within the Greater Manchester Brigade. The emergence of a black and ethnic leadership (B&EMM) under Niall Grovesnor (GMC Representative) and Paul Greaves (No.5 Regional Representative) are now key to the cutting edge of the Union's Fairness at Work Policy. The continuing development of social equality policies within the Brigade remains problematic, misunderstood and from time to time adversarial.

'Black and White in the Red' neatly side-steps potential adversity that may arise from the perceptions of a student teacher relationship. Through this medium no such power relationship exists as the audience observes and enters a landscape of black experience and consciousness.

An explosion of emergency audible warning devices and voice-overs describing firefighters as part of a family gives way to guitar and drums (Sarah Richards). You can hear the diesel engine and the lyrics: 'Burning building we're just in time, just another call on the 999'. 'One more day in the firefighter game'. The voice-over breaks in and a firefighter says, "It must be the worst job in the world if there are people who you don't like on a small station, but it's the best job in the world if you get on".

Rogers, alias Master of Ceremonies, provides a historic

BANNER THEATRE



Helen McLardie makes a point in the debate after the show. Also in the picture (l to r): Barry Dixon (DCFO, GMC), Wilma Lawrence and Paul Greaves.

narrative into the immigration of cheap black labour into post war Britain from the late 1940s onwards. 'Too Much Pressure', delivered in the punk style of the 1970s reflects and drives home the prejudice and racism black people encountered in those early years. "My dad came here looking for digs," says Helen McLardie, "And people pouring boiling water on his head". In defiant emphasis the song rings out: 'We're Black and British, we are here to stay!'

In 'Fire Town' Wisdom and Rogers wearing cowboy hats strut, saunter and sing: 'I'm the DO, ADO, SO, ACO, Deputy Chief Sheriff of Fire Town, salutation cowboy?' 'Ain't no injuns in this town the ones that come here don't stick around'. 'The DO Sheriff is a hard man but he's 'decent'. This comic machismo style is of course inextricably linked to exclusiveness. It's the failure to see: "That the joke has got to be in the eye of the person who's being joked about" and to recognise that people can get killed because of their colour. It's the failure to recognise the seriousness of exclusion and isolation.

A black firefighter says: "I remember being on a fire engine once, sitting on the back of a fire engine" and the driver had to pull up sharply and his first words were, "Get out of the road you silly black *****" and I was sitting in at the back. How would you feel about that?"

In 'I Only Want to Be Me', Banner Theatre poignantly describes this isolation in song, it is a plea for acceptance and understanding that should be taken to heart:

Is there a uniform under the skin?
Is there a rulebook for letting me in?
This is a prison you hold the key
I only want to be free

Later in the show a voice-over from Steve Godward says: "A good watch can be your family. It can be that strong. It should say that you wouldn't do that to your own, for the colour of our skin. What a load of malarkey! You put your life on the line going into a building with this person and then you try to destroy them. There's no bloody colour in smoke is there? There's no black or white in smoke. You're two firefighters. There's no sex there's no colour you just get on and do the job. That's what it's all about".

When the tabloids and politicians play the race card the defeat of racism becomes a revolutionary task. 'The Blacks are to Blame', is a forceful rendition that goes to the roots of racism, 'The Blacks are to blame they are stealing your jobs'; 'Roll out the tabloids turn up the hate, asylum seekers scrounging off the state'.

This perspective echoes throughout the theatre when a voice says, "So, I think the people in power have a vested interest in keeping alive a level of racism, because if racism were to disappear the white people as well as the black people would turn round and see the shit that the people in power are giving them. They'd be the next people to get the axe, they'd say, "Ok we've sorted out all this crap now explain to me why 10% of the population owns 80% of its wealth and how did they attain it? We've sorted this issue out so now you're the next issue we need to sort out".

Black and White in the Red is a stunning production. Played out before guests as well as Union, Management and Authority Representatives, the second half of the evening led to a full and lively debate. Not everyone agreed, why should they? Regional, Brigade and Fairness at Work Committees should put the booking of Banner Theatre's, 'Black and White in the Red' at the top of their agendas.

Is the pension scheme safe?

Malcolm Peel
No 4 Regional Chair

EVER since I can remember, there has been rumour and speculation about detrimental changes to the Firefighters Pension Scheme. There has always been talk of taxing the commutation. Even last year, the New Labour Government was putting forward ideas to tax this element of the FPS, if any of its members exercised their right under the Scheme, to retire before their respective compulsory age of retirement. This wasn't a direct attack on the FPS itself, simply an attack on its members. Their argument was that there are too many people retiring before they have to. But instead of offering an incentive to firefighters to remain in employment, like the Union's proposal to stop paying contributions after full entitlement has been reached, they choose to resort to the big stick.

This is a small event in the recent history of the FPS. The Smash and Grab Campaign over recent years saw a brand new Scheme drawn up. It did not amend the present Scheme, it replaced it. It was worse than the present one, but everyone knew that. The person who drafted it actually acknowledged the fact in the document. We all reacted in the only way possible, faced with such an attack. But for most of us, it was only too familiar. We had been fighting local skirmishes about the Pension Scheme for a long time. Individual Principal Officers and Chairs of Authorities were organising themselves to destroy the FPS and Conditions of Service.

The most concerted attack has recently been repelled. A lengthy and costly legal battle has been waged in the High Court and Appeal Court to protect members' rights and the basic principles of the Fire Fighters Pension Scheme. The same principle that the Scheme states in the opening paragraphs of the Pensions Commentary. "It is a generous scheme, because of the very nature of the job and the fitness levels which must be maintained throughout the career". This is not unique to firefighters. There are also similar provisions made in the Police and Armed Forces

Schemes. It is not something that the FBU dreamed up to thwart any changes to our Pension Scheme. It is obvious to anyone that a firefighter needs to be fit to do his or her job, all of that job and not just a part of it. The generosity of the Scheme is, of course, offset by the fact that it is an expensive Scheme to be a part of. The enhancements which firefighters are entitled to if they are permanently disabled for operational duties cost the members of the FPS 11% in contributions. A pertinent question in the FBU's case against West Yorkshire Fire Authority from our QC, Geoffrey Burke, asked why, if there is no requirement for firefighters to fight fires and maintain their fitness levels, do they pay 11% and not the 5% or 6%, equivalent to other Schemes which do not have this requirement.

During that case in the High Court and the subsequent appeal, we heard the arguments put to the Judges, which set about the destruction of the FPS. Not simply attempting to misinterpret the Rules, but to completely isolate it's members from any rights at all. Even at the time of writing, a Chief Officer is still refusing to accept that he and his new Fire Authority does not have the total discretion to decide to retire a member of the FPS.

The Judges had to decide whether some of the decisions made in West Yorkshire had been made legally and under the terms of firefighters' contracts. A number of separate, but closely linked issues were at stake. Can a firefighter still be a firefighter under the Grey

Book, the Discipline Regulations, the Qualified Firefighters Job (1977), or the FPS. It may seem obvious to anyone that a firefighter must be able to fight fires, but this was one of the main arguments because in practically all the FPS Rules, it states that it is exclusively for 'regular firefighters'. When the question was asked in court if they were saying that a regular firefighter would still be employed without any requirement to engage in their core activity of fire-fighting, they had to concede that the answer was 'Yes'.

The Fire Authorities' argument also sought to challenge what the phrase in the FPS, "permanently disabled" actually means. How permanent does it have to be? How disabled does someone

'It is a generous scheme, because of the very nature of the job and the fitness levels which must be maintained throughout the career'

PENSIONS



Some of the 24 West Yorkshire firefighters now allowed to retire on ill health grounds (l to r): Martin Tinsley, Andy Lockwood, Colin Oxley, Sean Cahill (Brigade Secretary), Paul Millaire, Harry Harwood

have to be? How many operational firefighters can be transferred to permanent non-operational duties before pumps are going off the run? In a direct question to the QC for West Yorkshire, Justice Burton asked if one of the firefighters named in the action was permanently disabled. Up to that point, there was an argument that he was not. However Mr Hand conceded that Mr Lockwood "was permanently disabled – for the moment". Clearly a case of an abuse of the wording. All the judges found that both Lockwood and Macalman named in the action were permanently disabled and were subsequently awarded backdated qualifying injuries.

Taking all these effects into account, what actually happened when the Brigade transferred any of these members permanently onto light duties represented a change to their contract of employment. They could no longer be classed as regular firefighters under the terms of the FPS and therefore could not be a member of it. The Discipline Code no longer applied to them and they were retired due their permanent disablement. The Brigade had, in effect, reduced the operational establishment and should have submitted a Section 19 application to the Secretary of State and ran the full consultation process.

The date that they were all deemed to be permanently disabled is all-important. For all the reasons above, it is the date that they retired and the date when their respective pensions are calculated. For all these members, it means that their pension is less than it would be today. What it also means is that they have a lump sum calculated at the date of their retirement, ill health and injury pensions backdated from the present day back to that same date and a reimbursement of all their pension contributions to that date. Pensions increases will be included as index linking and their present salaries are protected. In some cases, this means that there are total individual payments in excess of £130,000.

Because of the effect this has had on the Brigade establishment, the FBU came to an agreement with the management of West Yorkshire to maintain their operational establishment and replace all those who had now retired. This was always going to be

the most difficult for the Brigade to manage, taking into account that this was a backdated decision. But after taking legal advice and consulting the General Secretary, we were satisfied that, for this very unique situation, we could talk about redundancies. This is purely down to the facts that these people were now retired members, who had been temporarily and inadvertently, employed in roles they could not fulfil. They were no longer uniformed members of a Fire Brigade and could not continue to contribute to the Pension Scheme. Their respective positions now must be filled by fully fit firefighters, who will ride fire appliances. This does not mean that redundancy can be used as an alternative to retirement, or that we would not resist its use in any other form. The FBU's policy on redundancies is clear and intact. It is a disgrace that all these members have had to wait for up to seven years to retire.

But what of the 24 members of the FPS from West Yorkshire caught up in the legal and moral wrangling of the last seven years. What has it meant for them? Why do they now have to deal with depression and psychological illnesses as well as the physical injuries that they suffered those years ago? Many now have to belatedly appeal for qualifying injury awards and others for increases in their percentages of injury pension due to their worsening health. The court cases may be over and another attempt to destroy the Pension Scheme has been defeated, but the effects on individual members and their health can never be backdated.

Despite this result and the decisions of three very senior Judges, there are Chief Officers who still believe that they can make the same challenges. There are still Fire Authorities who would like to remove firefighters' rights to an ill health pension, should they be permanently disabled. All members of the Firefighters Pension Scheme must be aware that there is only one thing which stops these people from achieving their goal. The FBU, or rather us, the members of the FBU.

So, to answer my own question at the beginning of the article, the FPS is safe as long as we protect it from the people who wish to destroy it.

LETTERS

GREY AREA OF PUBLIC LIABILITY

Dear FireFighter

AS A serving State Registered Paramedic in the London Ambulance Service NHS Trust and GMB Steward I have mulled over the LFB proposals for a first response trial based at Hillingdon, whilst I understand the respective managerial camps are all for this I feel the FBU stance is quite correct in warning off its members.

As I have since registration had to take out an indemnity of £1 million, as have many of my colleagues. There now remains a grey area of public liability for incorrect treatments or diagnosis since registration. I appreciate that an appliance may conduct themselves with basic first aid in the absence of Qualified

Ambulance Personnel but agree with the FBU that to extend the current role would jeopardise both the patient and render the Fireperson liable for the consequences of incorrect treatment or improper diagnosis.

It is worthy of note that as paramedics we are now being directed through a progressive educative route to attain the BSc Hons in Paramedical Science this is far removed from the qualifications required ten years ago and serves to highlight the complexities of a modern Ambulance Service.

Dave Ryell, Paramedic

FOOTNOTE:

The comment is correct – members would be individually liable. Employers would also be vicariously liable and in practice they would pay for any negligence. Nevertheless, members remain technically liable and indeed management can also seek recoupment of payments made under vicarious liability.

Doug Christie, Thompsons Solicitors

WORTLEY HALL

The workers' stately home is 50 years old

Stewart Charnley
President, Wortley Hall

IT IS hard to believe that 50 years ago, on 5 May 1951, Wortley Hall opened its doors officially. Prior to that people had been hard at work clearing up, commencing renovations and cleaning the rooms. It had been left boarded up by the family of the Earl of Wharnccliffe following his death, so you can imagine what state the building was in.

Over the past 50 years many volunteers have spent their spare time up at the Hall rewiring, redecorating and repairing the fabric of the building. Outside the gardens were brought back to their past glories. Some Trade Unions adopted some rooms to ensure they remain in good condition. The Fire Brigades Union is one of those friends of Wortley by looking after the small dining room, which really is a beautiful room. The room is used regularly for special functions/dinners and looks at its best when laid out for a formal dinner.

Each year many people spend time at the Hall either on holiday, at meetings or attending some form of educational



gathering. It pleases me to say the Fire Brigades Union is a very regular user of Wortley Hall – I hope we are worthy of your continued support. The Hall commenced its days known as 'Labour's Home' and is now commonly referred to as 'The Workers' Stately Home'. It has changed over the years and now offers en-suite facilities, modern educational facilities, an IT suite and a recently renovated licensed club.

Our Golden Anniversary is being marked with a number of events, which include a 'Golden Appeal' for organisations and individuals to donate money into a fund for further refurbishment, including upgraded educational equipment. The South Yorkshire Festival is on Saturday 7 July (subject to no foot and mouth restrictions) and will mark our special year. A time capsule is also being prepared and will be placed inside the Hall. A book and tapes will be published with the history of the Hall, individual memories and some anecdotes as its contents.

It is a special year for everyone up at Wortley Hall and its supporters. We move into our next 50 with confidence. The dream of 50 years ago is still alive – thank you for your support.

TRAINING FOR WOMEN IN TRADITIONALLY MALE JOBS

Enriching space



Linda Shanahan
Member **STUC**
Women's Committee

IN MARCH 2001, as a member of the WSTUC, I was invited to accompany the Chair, Annie Thorne, who was representing the WSTUC at the above conference. The name Ganar Espacios is Catalan for 'Enriching Space'.

The theme of the conference was that the presence of women in the workplace is a transforming one. The business was centred on exploring positive initiatives to provide training and where necessary, make adjustments to accommodate women in the workplace without affecting performance or reducing standards.

Delegates attended from all over Catalonia as well as Spain, Italy, Denmark and Scotland. Whilst many of the problems and attitudes to women in the workplace seem universal, it was immediately noticeable that whilst in the UK women's conferences are attended predominantly by women, this conference had a large number of male delegates as well as speakers. The obvious ease in attitudes to mainstreaming was particularly welcome to both Annie and myself and only emphasised the differences here at home.

The morning of the conference explored women's experiences in the workplace and went on to inform delegates of training experiences within the Trade Union movement.

I was invited to participate as a speaker in the first session, along with three other women; a train driver who had received quite bad treatment at the hands of her colleagues, a young welder whose experience was a positive one, thanks to interventions and encouragement from Programa Dona, a joint initiative being developed by the Polytechnic University of Catalonia (UPC)

GANAR ESPACIOS

Conference on professional training and orientation for women in traditionally male jobs
Barcelona, 23 March 2001

and an employer who owns a decorating business.

The experiences of these women were uncannily similar to many stories we hear of here in the UK and each of the two employed women gave examples of where, because they had entered into occupations which had always been for men, some of the working practices had to be altered. For instance, the young welder found it very difficult to work whilst lying on the floor underneath machinery when welding. Once the machinery was altered so that she could stand, other male employees also found working whilst standing easier than previously. This was a good example of practices changing not because women couldn't

do the job, but because they had not changed and been developed over the years.

It was pleasing to note that a group of firefighters from Barcelona attended specifically to discuss working practices, as they have recently taken on six women firefighters and are keen to integrate them fully

It was pleasing to note that a group of firefighters from Barcelona attended specifically to discuss working practices, as they have recently taken on six women firefighters and are keen to integrate them fully into the service

into the service, but are unaware of some of the difficulties they may face. Links have been made and will be forwarded when names and addresses are available.

This was followed by trainers and advisors related to continuous training who presented specific tools and programs on the conference subject. Work had been done with construction, refurbishing and restoration companies to raise awareness on the issues surrounding the employment of women in traditionally male jobs and before women were employed, setting up conditions and policies like harassment policies.

This was a major challenge for the Institute involved, as well as the sector within the Union, as a great deal of prejudice from tutors, families of prospective women applicants and the rest of the workforce had to be overcome. Training opportunities had to be negotiated with colleges and employers, but finally, this project

is off the ground and of the ten who are fully trained, eight have jobs, with many more women in the pipeline.

For those not associated with such positive initiatives, many of the problems experienced by women are very similar to those we have in the UK. Many women qualify, but are unable to get employment in their chosen role. Women, like the welder, are expected to adapt to male working practices, clothing and equipment made for men.

Once they are in the workplace then their time is taken up adapting, fighting for facilities, countering discrimination and/or harassment. With other social and domestic pressures, this means that they often feel it is difficult enough to survive. Their self-esteem is lowered and they suffer guilt as society places its own stereotyped images on them.

One area which was common to all women who attended was the lack of facilities available in the workplace. The afternoon session included presentations from other international delegates, including a particularly inspiring contribution from the

There was a strong bond of shared experiences and aims. Hopefully we will be able to build on the links that have been formed and support and strengthen them to our mutual advantage.

Danish delegate, who gave examples of similar initiatives, which included an information leaflet circulated to employers and promulgated in the media called "A lock on the shower door", which gave advice to employers on the minimum standards needed to ensure privacy and dignity for the workforce. Unfortunately there was no English translation, but this is perhaps an example of how the Women's STUC can assist women workers and employers in Scotland in the future.

During this session, Annie spoke on the work of the STUC Women's Committee, giving some of the history of the 50:50 Campaign and its involvement in the education of women Trade Union members in Scotland, which was extremely well received by an enthusiastic audience.

Many links were made with other women Trade Unionists and as we finally discovered the most common language we had was French (there were rather different skill levels involved), we were finally able to communicate effectively with the aid of some sign language.

Although the Trade Union organisation in Catalonia and the rest of Spain is significantly different from our own Trade Union movement, there was a strong bond of shared experiences and aims. Hopefully we will be able to build on the links that have been formed and support and strengthen them to our mutual advantage.

Fire Brigades Union Gay & Lesbian Support Group

www.fbu.org.uk/sections/ngl.html



email us at:
gal01@fbu-ho.org.uk

write to: NGLC
(national gay and lesbian committee)
PO Box 10555
London N1 8XT

Phone: 0800 7834778

The trade union movement represents ALL working people, regardless of their sex, race, religious belief, sexuality or disability.

All FBU members are entitled to the full rights and benefits of Union membership. The FBU believes in Fairness at Work for everyone and is committed to the elimination of all forms of discrimination, both at work and within the community.

The group was set up by gay and lesbian firefighters and control staff who are 'out' in the workplace and felt they were in a position to help others within the UK fire service. Within the group's five year existence, we have achieved official recognition with the FBU, as well as representing the FBU in forums which were once untouched. We also have an extensive network to support and advise gay, lesbian and bisexual members who may feel isolated or harassed.

The group is run on a strictly confidential basis and accepts the rules, constitution and democracy of the Fire Brigades Union.

Our main aims are:

- ★ Ensuring gay and lesbian members have a voice within the FBU, and making sure we are not left out in equality issues at Brigade, Regional and National level.
- ★ Providing support to gay, lesbian and bisexual members in ALL regions of the FBU.
- ★ Identifying and dealing with any issues/problems faced by our members.
- ★ Providing members with the opportunity to talk/meet with other members.
- ★ Distribute information concerning gay and lesbian issues to members.

Any gay, lesbian or bisexual FBU member contacting the group will only be dealt with by a group member. All information will be protected and NOT made available to any official unless the member gives his/her permission.



0800 783 4778 0800 783 4778 0800 783 4778

25 YEAR BADGES



Bro S Hooton receives his 25 year badge from South Yorkshire Brigade Secretary Paul Matthewman



Bro M Hackett receives his 25 year badge from South Yorkshire membership Secretary Gerry Wilson



Chris Carlier receives his 25 year badge from Surrey Chair Steve Burnell



Tony Roche receives his 25 year badge from Divisional Secretary Mick Weald at Chelmsford, Essex



Barry Myhill receives his 25 year badge from Divisional Secretary Mick Weald at Chelmsford, Essex



Aberdare branch members (l to r) Vernon James, Nigel Parry, Alun Evans, Peter Jones, Charlie Newton and Roger Lewis receive their 25 year badges



Tony (Sandy) Sandeman of F33 Whitechapel White Watch receives his 25 year badge from Branch Secretary Les Reid. Watch colleagues and his daughter Holly look on



Grampian Brigade Secretary John Curran receives his 25 year badge from Brigade Chair Charlie Duncan



Thirty nine FBU members received 25 year badges in Manchester from No 5 Region EC Member Phil Micallef. They were: Terry Osborne, Rochdale; Roger Evans, Rochdale; Tony Heffernan, Heywood; Mick Hornby, Heywood; Jimmy Campbell, Chadderton; Steve Quigley, Chadderton; John Flannery, Bury; Dave Blood, Bury; Paul Baker, Bury; Howard Barker, Stalybridge; Kenneth Holt, Stalybridge; Neville Garthwaite Bolton; David Brants, Bolton; Geoff Haddock, Bolton; Neil Bannister, Bolton; Neil Barlow, Farnworth; Geoff Pendlebury, Salford; Thomas McManus, Salford; Alan Blay, Irlam; Paul Ruddy, Irlam; Kevin Lowry, Sale; Alan David Priest, Sale; Mark Sumner, Altrincham; Paul Reid, Altrincham; Keith Bailey, Altrincham; Robin Haigh, Altrincham; Keith Anderson, Altrincham; John Morley, Wythenshawe; Michael Collins, Manchester Central; Pete Freakes, Philips Park; Ian Fensom, Philips Park; Bernard Gribben, Gorton; Tom Forde, Gorton; Ian Gordon, Whitehill; Fred Arrowsmith, Whitehill; John Twigg, Whitehill; Steve Franklin, Stockport; James Allen, Cheadle; Jill Drugan, Control